

APPENDIX C

Background to community engagement

There are various definitions of community engagement and community cohesion. This appendix aims to help you understand some of this jargon!

Definitions of community engagement

In a 2003 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) report, engagement and involvement are seen as terms used to describe the same thing.

'Involvement is most often used to mean the involvement of local people in public decision making. Another meaning is the involvement of people in general community activity. A third meaning is the provision of services by community and voluntary organisations.'
(CDF 2003)

The involvement of people in decision making is a common theme to the definitions given.

Your Neighbourhood – Getting involved and having a say, an introduction to the discussion document *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, is an ODPM and Home Office publication.

Rather than providing a definition of community engagement, the question 'What do we want to see?' is asked.

- Where community engagement is taking place, what do we want to see?
- more people everywhere getting actively involved in their neighbourhoods*
 - local people able to influence decisions about their own neighbourhoods and public services.*

The relevance of volunteering

Community engagement includes the involvement of people (volunteers) who are involved in decision making about services. They work with services to identify area of improvement and work with services deliver improvements.

The Compact Code on Volunteering provides a definition of volunteering;

'An important expression of citizenship and fundamental to democracy. It is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain'

The Compact Code on Volunteering goes on to give examples of what constitutes volunteer activity. <http://www.thecompact.org.uk/>

Further information about volunteers in libraries is available from the *Lending Time project evaluation*

<http://www.csv.org.uk/Volunteer/Part-time/Lending+Time/>

A checklist for aspects of managing a volunteer programme is included in the toolkit at Appendix E.

Active citizenship and lifelong learning

Active citizenship is about people taking the opportunity to get involved *'in defining and tackling problems of their communities and improving their quality of life'*.

<http://www.active-citizen.org.uk>. Taking part in community engagement and volunteering offers active citizens the opportunity to learn and develop their skills whilst benefiting the wider community.

Citizenship is now part of the national curriculum. There are opportunities through community engagement to develop involvement of young people as active citizens

<http://www.csv.org.uk/Services/Education/>

So, what is a community...?

The Civil Renewal Unit <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk> defines community as:

'a specific group of people who all hold a something in common. Community has tended to be associated with two key aspects: firstly people who share locality or geographical place; secondly people who are communities of interest. Communities of interest are groups of people who share an identity – for example Afro-Caribbean people; or who share an experience – for example people with a particular disability'.

There can be many communities of interest within one area. Some people may feel that they don't belong to any community. Involving people in community activities can help build community cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Deciding which community the engagement will be with is the first step. Over time, more groups can get involved.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion occurs when people or places are excluded from achieving the outcomes, or from accessing the opportunities conventionally available. This can occur due to discrimination, or to the presence of social problems.

Involving people in the library service can contribute to social inclusion, where all members of society have the opportunity to take part.

Community profiles will identify the demographics of people living locally. This can help to recognise under represented groups. There will be others too who are under represented, such as communities of interest (see Toolkit section 4.3).

The ODPM publication *Breaking the Cycle* tells us that people from Black and Minority Ethnic (B&ME) groups; or refugees and asylum seekers; are commonly those for whom policies are less effective. Help to include frequently excluded groups, such as those with mental health difficulties; young people; disadvantaged people who move frequently; and many other groups; is available from the Social Exclusion Unit: www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk. There is some information about possible partner organisations in section 4.3 of the toolkit.

There is a Compact code of good practice about working with B&ME groups www.thecompact.org.uk.

Consultation

Consultation is a tool for gaining ideas from the wider community. Much has been written about consultation elsewhere (the IPF toolkit produced for Framework for the Future has further information – see www.mla.gov.uk). Community Engagement is concerned with the active participation and involvement of the community in activities, including decision making. It is not concerned with consultation.